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TOPIC: AUSTRALIA TO SEVER DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH LIBYA
Jana Wendt interviews
- Hon. R.J.L. Hawke, AC, MP, Prime Minister

JANA WENDT: Tonight, Prime Minister Hawke's dramatic move against Libya. As you will have heard on the news, the Prime Minister has ordered the immediate closure of the Libyan Peoples Bureau in Canberra and its diplomats are being expelled from Australia. Colonel Gaddafi's most senior representative here has been given just 10 days to leave the country. Mr Hawke has taken this action in the absence of Foreign Minsiter, Bill Hayden, who is still in Europe. He accuses the Libyans of destabilising activities throughout the Pacific and says they have been intruding into Australian domestic affairs, causing confrontation and dissension. Mr Hawke joins us now, live from our studio in Parliament House, Canberra.

Mr Hawke, thanks for your time tonight. What led to this decision today?

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BOB HAWKE: Well, a combination of factors. Externally, Jana, Libya has been engaged in destabilising activities in our region, and the Bureau here has facilitated those destabilising activities. Internally they are also engaged in activities which involve setting sections of this community against other sections of the community. And we have been considering this action for some time. I have not rushed into it because there are intelligence considerations that were involved, and also the conveying of our position to our friends and neighbours in the Pacific.

JANA WENDT: Now, the intelligence information involved comes from our own intelligence organisations?

BOB HAWKE: Yes.

JANA WENDT: International intelligence organisations?

BOB HAWKE: No, from our own.

JANA WENDT: Our own, okay. You talk about the Bureau facilitating those activities. How did the Bureau facilitate Libya's activities?

BOB HAWKE: I can't, obviously for security reasons, go into those details. Simply let me say this: That we have compelling, incontrovertible evidence that the Bureau has been involved in facilitating activities, both in terms of providing non-financial facilities and also financial facilities for their actions in countries in the region.

I'm not going to tolerate a position where this Government, which by - that's this Libyan Government - a country of three million people on the north coast of Africa, is engaged in destabilising activities in the South Pacific region. I'm not going to cop it.

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JANA WENDT: You've been pretty tolerant of them so far. They've been here for a number of years, they've invested a lot of money, and now this is tough talk. Can you talk more specifically about their activities, the activities that have led to this?

BOB HAWKE: Let me say this: They have sent people for training in paramilitary activities in Libya. Some of those people have gone from New Caledonia. They have contacts with the OPM which is the dissident movement concerned with trying to upset the position on the border between West Irian and Papua New Guinea - no more sensitive area for Australia's security interest than that, and with Fretilin in Timor. And they are providing, sort of paramilitary training for people who go back into this region. And given the size of some of these countries, you don't need a considerable number of people with such training and who are committed to the non-democratic process to create a situation which could be totally destabilising. And as far as I'm concerned, I have a basic responsibility for the welfare and security of this country and its interest in the region. And I've reached a point with my colleagues where we had sufficient information to guarantee to us that these things were happening, and I'm not going to tolerate it any longer.

JANA WENDT: Alright, we've talked about the external situation. Obviously there's been a lot of talk in recent times about Mr Mansell's visit to Libya. How seriously did you take that?

BOB HAWKE: I took it very seriously. It would not of itself have been sufficient to precipitate this decision, but it was part of a pattern of destabilisation. What you've got to understand is, as I say, here's a country of three million people on the north coast of Africa, whose record wherever they have been has been one of destabilisation, a preparedness to embrace the tactic of terror. And they have no legitimate, by no stretch of the imagination can that country have a right to be involved in the training of people in our region in paramilitary purposes and activities. That's not for the good of any country in this region and it's certainly not good for the stability of the region itself.

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JANA WENDT: Well, how did you assess the risk there to Australia's Aboriginal community, to the wider community?

BOB HAWKE: Oh, within Australia the in thing, Jana, which is calculated to set one section of the Australian community against another is not acceptable. As far as Australians themselves are concerned, if they want to set up offices, Mathaba offices in Melbourne, where they want to espouse a particular ideological point of view that I don't agree with, then if Australian citizens want to do that, okay, that's properly part of the democratic processes. But I'm not going to allow a situation where the existence of a Bureau of Libya here is going to facilitate that sowing of dissension within Australia.

JANA WENDT: Are you suggesting that the Bureau here gave people like Mr Pash and Mr Mansell support, encouragement, financial support?

BOB HAWKE: You'll appreciate that I can't go properly to the intelligence which is available to us. But quite clearly the existence of a Bureau here must, in one way or another, facilitate those activities.

JANA WENDT: Obviously there is a difference between the Colonel for instance offering funds to Aboriginal communities in Australia and actually precipitating what you would call a destabilising influence in this country. I mean, where did we reach the point where he crossed the line?

BOB HAWKE: Let me read what Colonel Gaddafi said at the Mathaba conference in March in Libya. He said, he urged Pacific islanders to join a single front which stretches from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, to stage a revolution, to fight to the end. Now, the activities here within Australia are part of that total process of revolution and destabilisation. If he wants to preach in Libya that ideology, so be it.

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BOB HAWKE (cont): But once he gets to a stage where he is facilitating that sort of revolutionary approach within my country or within the region of my country, and I have sufficient information to establish that that is occuring, then that's the end of it.

JANA WENDT: What kind of scenario did you envisage had the Libyan Peoples Bureau been allowed to stay in Australia?

BOB HAWKE: Well, there would have been a continuation of their facilitation of such activities in the region, and obviously there would have been, in one way or another, been there at the Bureau a focal point for assistance to these sort of activities within Australia.

JANA WENDT: Mr Hawke, did you consult with Mr Hayden on this decision?

BOB HAWKE: Yes, Mr Hayden was involved in the discussions before he went away. And I've had further discussions by phone with him while he's been away.

JANA WENDT: On the 23rd of April Mr Howard urged you to take the action that you have in fact taken today. Now, in response to that Mr Hayden said this: At this stage we see no evidence of a threat domestically and we're able to maintain quite effective monitoring of the activities of the Libyan Peoples Bureau. Now, what's changed in that, less than a month?

BOB HAWKE: Well, let me make two points: Mr Howard has been briefed about the nature of our concerns, about the intelligence aspects of our deliberations, fully briefed on that, and knows what we were considering, why we were following the timetable we were following. He's fully aware of that. The second point I make is that if in fact you are considering the possibility of action such as this, you don't telegraph your punches either in the Parliament or anywhere else and say to the Libyans: Look, we're looking very closely at your activities. We may be about to kick you out. You don't operate like that.

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JANA WENDT: Are you saying that when Mr Hayden made that statement he was aware that you were about to move on the Libyan Peoples Bureau?

BOB HAWKE: Mr Hayden, as I repeat, has been involved in the discussions going back over some period of time about the consideration that needs to be given as to whether the Libyan Peoples Bureau was going to stay here. You won't say - and I'm not implying that you're trying to do this, Jana - but you won't sow any dissensions between Mr Hayden and myself on this.

JANA WENDT: Mr Hawke, if Australians are in fact still free to travel to Libya, what's to stop this continuing destabilisation, if you like, of say Aboriginal communities in this country?

BOB HAWKE: Well, this is a democratic government and we're not going to take people's visas off them. If they wish to go and associate themselves with this notorious and objectionable regime, characterised by the practice of terror around the world, then that is their free and democratic right.

BOB HAWKE (cont): But we are not going to facilitate that country in its activities in the region or in this country by any longer having their Bureau here.

JANA WENDT: Mr Hawke, I appreciate you giving us your time tonight. Thanks for joining us.

BOB HAWKE: I appreciate your questions, Jana. Thank you very much.

JANA WENDT: Mr Hawke joining us live from our Canberra studio.